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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0482
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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
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COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. U.S. Elections

[1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The Jerusalem Post cited a Post/ Smith Research poll, which found that the Rightist bloc led by Likud will defeat the Left, led by Kadima and Labor, by eight Knesset seats (see below). The Jerusalem

Post reported that Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz is not likely to accept the chairmanship of Kadima's election campaign that Livni offered him yesterday. HaQaretz reported that Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu intends to reserve a secure spot in his party list for former justice minister Dan Meridor, a moderate, despite reservations in Likud. Maariv reported that moderate MK Rabbi Michael Melchior, who chairs the Education, Culture, and Sports Committee and the Social-Environmental lobby in the Knesset and has been a faithful ally of the Labor Party since 1999, may join Kadima.

HaQaretz reported that leaders of the four right-wing factions making up the National Union-National Religious Party (NRP) list -- NRP, Tekuma, Achi, and Moledet's religious wing -- are expected to announce their formal merger into a party next week. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that procedural hitches are impeding the merger process. HaQaretz reported that a group of Israeli Arab politicians seeks to establish a new party that would represent all members of their fragmented community in the upcoming general elections. Maariv and other media reported that Science, Culture, and Sports Minister Raleb Majadele (Labor) might join a new Arab party.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Senator Barack Obama has told Israeli public figures whom he met recently that he has devised an outline for his Middle East policy as president that is based on recognition that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is necessary to the resolution of the Iranian problem. HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post cited an exit poll released yesterday as saying that American citizens who voted in the U.S. presidential elections via absentee ballots from Israel favored Sen. John McCain. Seventy-six percent of those polled by the Jerusalem-based firm Keevon said they voted for the Republican candidate, while 24 percent said they cast their ballots for Democratic candidate Barack Obama. The Jerusalem Post reported that Mitchell Barak from Keevon immediately acknowledged that the poll had over sampled voters from the Orthodox community.

Under the pretext of a phone call to his wife, the late PM Yitzhak Rabin's assassin Yigal Amir granted interviews to Channel 2-TV and Channel 10-TV, which were broadcast last night. When asked about who influence him at the time of the assassination, Amir named former PM Ariel Sharon, the late cabinet ministers Rafael Eitan and Rehavam Zeevi, and all those who said that the Oslo Accord was a disaster. The interviews reopened the media debate over the assassination.

HaQaretz quoted a senior GOI official as saying that PM Ehud Olmert intends to resume indirect, Turkish-mediated negotiations with Syria soon. The official added that talks between the Prime Minister's Bureau and the bureau of Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan would be held next week to try to coordinate an agreed-on date for what would be the fifth round of indirect talks with the Syrians. Yediot reported that Olmert has conveyed a message to Syria that the talks may be resumed. Meanwhile, HaQaretz reported that FM and Kadima chairwoman Tzipi Livni called for increased international pressure on Syria. Israel Radio quoted Likud as saying that Olmert has no right to engage in diplomatic negotiations.

The Jerusalem Post quoted an Egyptian security official as saying yesterday that police have discovered eight missiles in an underground bunker in the northern Sinai.

The Jerusalem Post reported that U.S. Middle East security coordinator Gen. James L. Jones, long expected to produce a document spelling out Israel's security needs after the creation of a Palestinian state, will not in the end present the Bush administration with a large-scale report.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday ultra-Orthodox legislator and Jerusalem mayoral candidate Meir Porush promised that if he won the municipal elections, he would promote the construction of Jewish neighborhoods in the city's eastern quarter.

HaQaretz reported that, with just minutes to spare in a 24-hour time frame granted by High Court justices, Hebron settlers submitted, in the form of an audio tape, what they called new and dramatic evidence in the case regarding a disputed house in the city that is claimed by both settlers and Palestinians. The Jerusalem Post also reported on the settlers' claim.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Rabbi David Rosen, director of the American Jewish Committee's Department for Interreligious Affairs, told the newspaper that Pope Benedict XVI may reconsider moving ahead with the beatification process that would prepare Holocaust-era Pope Pius XII for beatification.

Major media reported that yesterday PM Olmert resolved the higher education crisis by ordering that 515 million shekels (about \$ 139 million) be transferred to the universities.

Leading media reported that a 3,000-year-old ceramic shard, containing five lines of proto-Canaanite script, may be the oldest Hebrew inscription ever found. The shard, discovered near the Elah Valley, could confirm the existence of a Jewish kingdom in Israel between 1,000 and 975 BCE. Also, a unique seal from the First Temple period, 1,006-586 BCE, was found recently in Jerusalem's Old City, bearing a Hebrew name and decorated in the Assyrian style.

Leading media reported that veteran broadcast journalist Ram Evron died yesterday at the age of 73.

The Jerusalem Post's poll conducted on Wednesday found that Israelis would vote as follows (results in Knesset seats): Likud: 27; Kadima: 27; Labor Party: 14; Yisrael Beiteinu: 11; Shas: 11; Arab parties: 10; National Union Party and National-Religious Party: 9; United Torah Judaism: 6; Meretz: 5.

I. U.S. Elections:

Summary:

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Obama is the great black hope of humankind, after two terms of disappointment and a sense of betrayal.... Only one state is still interested in McCain's services -- Israel."

Columnist Jonathan Rosenblum wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "An America that more closely resembles Western Europe will not be good for Israel."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Favor Bush Did Obama"

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (10/31): "Bush did Obama a favor by preceding him. Now Obama is the great black hope of humankind, after two terms of disappointment and a sense of betrayal. His candidacy could only grow out of such deep, frightening despair, while the candidacy of the 'natural heir' -- John McCain -- became intolerable. Four or eight more years of Republican hegemony mean continuing the same policy.... Only one state is still interested in McCain's services -- Israel. Only Israel insists on continuing to live in a bubble. It is wrong, as usual. Bush was bad for the world and especially for us. America's ongoing wallowing in Iraq and its loss of deterrence power are bad for Israel, which isn't pulling out of anywhere. Israel is staying here, in the Middle East. Bush has forgotten us and the Palestinians. He refused to advance the talks with Syria and ignored -- like us -- the pan-Arab peace initiative lying on the table since 2002. McCain will be another such friend, whose friendship ensures calamity. Nobody can say what kind of president Obama will be, but at least he has the benefit of the doubt. McCain, on the other hand, does not bring new hope. Not even dubious hope."

II. "The End of the Special Relationship?"

Columnist Jonathan Rosenblum wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (10/31): Obama presented himself to Europeans last summer as a citizen of the world, one of them.... He shares the Europeans' contempt for the terminology of good and evil.... And he expresses understanding for the grievances of the perpetrators of evil - Hamas, Hizbullah, even the perpetrators of 9/11, which he characteristically portrayed as part of an underlying struggle between worlds of plenty and worlds of want (despite the affluent background of the attackers). He voted against a Senate bill to designate the Iranian Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization.... An America that more closely resembles Western Europe will not be good for Israel. Western Europeans consistently rate Israel the greatest threat to world peace. And they are remarkably cavalier about Israel's defense of its own existence.

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: Olmert does not regret his part in breaking the boycott of Syria, but he fears that if the talks should reach a stalemate, Israel will lose what it was supposed to receive in exchange.

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: It would be better to leave Jerusalem in the hands of a responsible ultra-Orthodox man than to give it to a man of the right who lacks political wisdom.

Block Quotes:

1I. "The Syrian Bridegroom"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (10/31): When the new administration enters the White House, American policy will change as well. The crisis that erupted this week between the two countries, after American helicopters attacked a target within Syria, will not prevent the thaw. Perhaps the opposite: if Syria swallowed the attack on the nuclear reactor and the assassination of Mughniyah, there is no reason for it not to swallow the American attack. Olmert does not regret his part in breaking the boycott of Syria, but he fears that if the talks should reach a stalemate, Israel will lose what it was supposed to receive in exchange. A stalemate on Israel's part opens the door to all kinds of dangers: Hizbullah could go back to work. The border with Syria could heat up. We should remember that both countries have each other by the throat. Israel can turn Syria into a heap of ruins. Syria can turn life here into hell. It would only take five rockets per day, in sensitive places. When Rabin gave the deposit to [Warren] Christopher and Netanyahu gave his deposit to [Ronald] Lauder, the decision was not brought up for a vote in the cabinet or in the security cabinet or reported to the public. When the government functions as a transitional government, the situation changes substantially. The Israelis, including those who are willing to cede the entire Golan Heights, will respond uncomfortably. Many of them will tell Olmert: You have no mandate.

II. "Vote No on Barkat"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (10/31): Many secular Jerusalem residents, among the voters for center and even left-wing parties, have chosen to ignore [secular candidate Nir] Barkat's right-wing style under the assumption/hope that his rhetoric will pry Jerusalem government out of ultra-Orthodox hands. Therefore Labor and Meretz are calling on the secular public to vote for Barkat for mayor over [ultra-Orthodox] rival Meir Porush.... A few days ago Barkat toured the East Jerusalem village of Anata, accompanied by two proponents of the plans for Jewish settlement in the heart of Arab neighborhoods.... Barkat promised that if he wins, he will promote his companions' initiative to establish a Jewish neighborhood in Anata, already named Eastern Gate. With utter scorn

for voter intelligence, the leading secular candidate explained that building the neighborhood will solve the city's shortage of housing for students and young people. A glance at a map reveals that this is yet another plan to tighten the Jewish continuum between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim while provoking the Palestinian leadership and violating the state's promises to the U.S administration.... The secular minority remaining in the city faces an unenviable choice between Barkat, Porush, and [controversial oligarch] Arkady Gaidamak. Given the options, it would be better to leave Jerusalem in the hands of a responsible ultra-Orthodox man than to give it to a man of the right who lacks political wisdom.

CUNNINGHAM